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Strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization

Third report of the Advisory Committee for Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the support and enhancement of the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization (A/57/355). During its consideration of the matter, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification.

2. The report of the Secretary-General is submitted in response to paragraph 145 of General Assembly resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit concrete proposals on strengthening the Department of Public Information within existing resources in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization.

3. The Advisory Committee recalls that the Organization's web site was created in 1995 through the redeployment of staff and non-staff resources from several areas of the Department. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (A/57/355, para. 4), for the biennium 2002-2004, the General Assembly allocated resources for this activity in the amount of $3,462,400, including: 17 redeployed regular budget posts (11 Professional (1 P-5, 2 P-4, 6 P-3, 2 P-2) and 6 General Service); and operational requirements for the Information Technology Section of the Department, which is responsible for web-related activities. In addition, there is a provision under general temporary assistance for one P-2 and four General Service posts, as well as funding from extrabudgetary resource for one P-3 and three General Service posts. The staffing structure is shown in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/355, para. 5).

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4. In his report, the Secretary-General indicated that the current resource capacity of the Department is barely at the maintenance level, and is not adequate to sustain the rapid expansion in the use of the web site or to keep pace with the daily addition of new material occurring in all the official languages (A/57/355, para. 8). The Department cannot, therefore, absorb the additional costs required to ensure the management of the enhanced content in all six official languages. The Committee notes that the number of web site accesses recorded for 2001 totalled 1.12 billion, compared to 488 million in 2000 (see A/AC.198/2002/6, para. 8, table).

5. In his report, the Secretary-General indicated that a total amount of $1,297,500 would be required to ensure the "continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the web site in all official languages" (A/57/355, paras. 8 and 19). The breakdown of the resource requirements is contained in the annex to that report. As shown, provision is made for eight new Professional (6 P-4, 2 P-3) and six General Service posts, including the conversion of the three General Service positions funded from general temporary assistance (see para. 3 above) into established posts. Two Professional staff members would be allocated to each language, thus ensuring language site coverage at all times.

6. The Advisory Committee notes that the proposal under consideration is in line with action 2 (A/55/355, para. 9), which was presented as the most desirable and feasible course of action in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the issue of the development and enhancement of the United Nations web site in all the official languages of the Organization (A/AC.198/2002/6). This action would "Allow the web sites to develop independently in each language, on the basis of the resource capacities of author Departments and Offices", compared to the more costly action 1, which would "Replicate all materials on the English web site in the other language sites".

7. The Advisory Committee commends the Secretary-General for the work achieved so far regarding the web site of the Organization and recognizes the importance of the web site as an outreach tool, as well as the importance of language parity as a means towards serving a broader spectrum of users. The Committee reiterates its view, expressed in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (A/56/7, para. VII.11), that a pragmatic and realistic approach to this matter is required. In this connection, the Committee also notes from the Secretary-General's report that the Committee on Information was not able to reach any decision on the issue of parity on the web site, requesting another report on the most practical, efficient and cost-effective means of achieving parity for all official languages of the web site (A/57/355, para. 15). The Committee further notes that in his report the Secretary-General, while reaffirming that action 2 appears as the most feasible, indicated that, within those cost parameters, there would be a need for prioritizing by exempting certain elements of the web site from translation requirements, such as treaties and press releases, which would continue to be provided in the languages in which they are currently issued (A/57/355, para. 16). This would require a decision by the General Assembly.

8. Should the General Assembly agree with the proposal to proceed along the lines set out in action 2, the related budgetary requirements are estimated at up to $1.3 million (see para. 5 above). **However, in view of the ongoing review of the Department of Public Information and consideration by the General Assembly of the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's recent report on the**

strengthening of the United Nations agenda for further change (A/57/387), the Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretary-General proceed to implement his proposal on the web site and report on the budgetary requirements, if any, in this regard in the context of the second performance report for the biennium 2002-2003.